

ZYGOTE

Zygote is tickled by the news that hand signals can control smart systems and wastes no time coming up with suggestive gestures of his own. He's finding it hard to raise a smile, though

GRIN AND BEAR IT

Sony's latest Cyber-shot cameras have built-in face recognition that can detect a smile and take a snap without human intervention. Yet the digital smiley seems to have replaced genuine expression for today's kids. So it may come as a surprise to learn that the smiley celebrated its 25th birthday on 19th September 2007.

In 1982, during a bulletin board discussion about online humour, Professor Scott Fahlman suggested the :-) sequence of characters to mark intentional jokes onscreen. In the 25 years since that fateful day, the smiley has colonised digital communications and its mutated offspring are everywhere in the form of emoticons.

Perhaps in the next 25 years, people will also mutate in order to read smileys more easily and evolve heads that can rotate sideways on their axis. Say ';-D

WEB RULES OK

Zygote has learned that 10 of the largest companies quoted on the relevant London Stock Exchange index are not complying with Rule 26 website disclosure requirements.

Rule 26 states that all quoted companies must maintain a website that includes up-to-date information about their business, such as details about the transfer of securities, constitutional documents and copies of any communications that have

been sent to shareholders in the previous year.

These regulations came into force last August, so either these 10 outfits are deliberately breaking the law or they are simply too incompetent to comply. Either way, heads should roll. Websites play a vital roll in attracting investors, and savvy investors are bound to question why they cannot get a full picture of the company they are interested in.

For details of the culprits, visit the Investis website (www.investis.com), which seems to be in business to help the arrogant and stupid comply.

GESTURE POLITICS

The Prime Minister of Australia has authorised two billion dollars (£890m) to deliver high-speed broadband to every citizen Down Under within the next 18 months. This coincides with engineers at the University of Wollongong coming up with smart systems that are controlled by hand signals instead of wireless units.

A camera is linked to a suitable device, such as a monitor or DVD machine, and embedded software allows it to recognise hand gestures that are translated into electronic commands. So an outstretched palm means power on, two fingers means select, and a clenched fist means start. Moving your hand up and down operates a scroll command for changing channels.

Zygote presumes this is a covert way of dissuading Australian males from playing with themselves while watching Kylie. Bonza.

BULLY BALLS

When the schools secretary Ed Balls launched the latest government crackdown on thought crime, he declared that over a third of 12- to 15-year-olds have suffered "cyber-bullying". This tabloid phrase embraces the use of mobile phones by children to threaten, impersonate and ridicule other children via texts, emails and video files, and the knee-jerk reaction of one teachers' union was to call for sites such as YouTube, MySpace and Bebo to be shut down.

The government pulled their usual stunt of passing the buck back to the knee-jerk reactors to sort out the problem, and in this case it declared that it should be teachers who complain to ISPs that host online abuse, and that it should also be teachers who demand to see the content of bullying text messages and emails.

This is pure Balls. Teachers are trained to teach, not police pupils or spy on private texts and emails. The solution is so bleeding obvious, Zygote cannot believe it has not been put into force throughout the land. The use of mobile phones by children in school should be banned. There is no need for them to send or receive messages during school hours, and certainly no need

for teachers to be unpaid thought-police. This is a case of parental blame in pandering to the little buggers. Mobile phones should be handed in at the school gates and collected on the way out.

As for using school computers to post bullying messages on social network sites, Zygote will not insult your intelligence by pointing out the simple remedy.

JUNK MALE

The USA is still responsible for most of the spam that clogs up our email systems. The latest analysis by IE Internet shows our American cousins generate over 37 per cent of all junk communications, well clear of second-placed China on 17 per cent, with Mexico and Russia producing around 10 per cent each.

The States once produced well over half of the world's spam, so this seems to indicate that recent US anti-spam legislation has had a significant effect. But a closer look by Zygote reveals that, far from reducing American online scams and junk, the new laws have simply moved operations offshore, with major US spammers relocating to nearby Mexico and the welcoming arms of China and Russia.

Although Zygote would like to see spammers packed into tins of luncheon meat, he would miss all those endearing email frauds from Nigeria. He would like to share one he received most recently, in case you were not on the target list:

"Hello, a pleasant day to you from Deepak Behera. Please can I have \$2,000, I need to purchase a 1960 portrait of the Queen of England, I have been longing to see one all my life, it was recently auctioned by the museum of Lagos. They are giving it away for \$2,500, I have deposited \$500 so it can be put on hold for me, and I have a fax contract. This is a dream come true for me, I promise to pay you back soon. Thanks." ☒

Great Moments in Computing © 1988-2007 Mel Croucher and Robin Grenville-Evans 239: SCANNERS



The first optical scanner was developed in 1969, and it was initially used for recognising bar codes.



By the 1990s, scanners were capable of character recognition, and intelligent text capture.



These days, the office scanner is a cheap, common device that requires no skill or technical knowledge to operate.